



HIGH-CONFLICT DIVORCE

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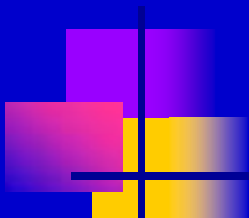
SOURCES OF CONFLICT

- Unresolved personal issues
- Unresolved marital issues
- Unresolved parenting issues
- Personality problems
- Other mental health problems



SURVEY SAYS

- 20-25% of children lived in HIGH-CONFLICT marriages
- 22% lived in low conflict marriages
- Low conflict → Low conflict do best
- HIGH-CONFLICT → HIGH-CONFLICT do worst
- Low conflict → Low conflict do poorly

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- Moderate conflict marriage does not put children at risk
 - 8 – 15% remain HIGH-CONFLICT 2- 3 years post-divorce



DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICT

- Duration
- Intensity
- Focus – child or other
- Verbal/physical/both
- Mediating factors that buffer effects
 - Other supportive adult
 - Positive sib relationships
 - Good social skills



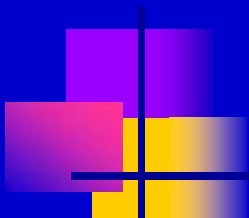
IT ISN'T ALWAYS BOTH PARENTS

- Don't assume both are equally responsible
- Identify each parent's contribution
- Identify each parent's efforts at communication & cooperation
- Identify efforts at disengagement



BEHAVIORS THAT INVOLVE THE CHILD

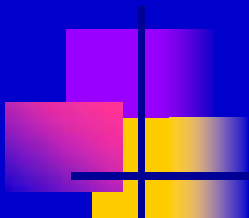
- Undermining the other parent's relationship with the child
- Sending messages
- Asking about other parent
- Participation in adult decisions
- Secrecy

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- Exposure to adult information, esp. “being honest”
 - Using the child as a confidante
 - Encouraging allegations



IDENTIFYING HIGH-CONFLICT PARENTS

- Protracted conflict about important & unimportant issues
- Intractable negative view of the other parent
- Marked by pervasive suspiciousness and mistrust
- System does not allow for new information

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- Attitude is disrespectful and contemptuous
 - Maintains polarized views
 - Loses focus on child's welfare
 - Involve police and attorneys frivolously
 - Can't tolerate others not sharing their view



IMPACT OF HIGH-CONFLICT

- Mothers are less warm and nurturing
- Mothers are more angry and rejecting of child
- Fathers withdraw from parenting
- Discipline is more erratic and coercive
- Interactions w/ child are more intrusive



HIGH-CONFLICT DIVORCE

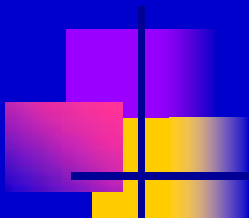
The Early Days





ALIENATION OR ESTRANGEMENT:

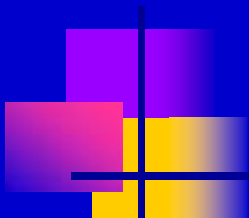
WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

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- Alignment, estrangement and alienation are complex
 - Issues with both parents and children contribute
 - Alienation is not a dyadic relationship



CHILDREN MAY SEEK TO:

- Align with the more nurturing parent
- Take care of a vulnerable/needy parent
- Avoid differences in parenting/life style
- Avoid the conflict

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- Avoid a non-nurturing relationship
 - Avoid disruption of routine
 - Avoid dealing with grief about divorce
 - Avoid uncomfortable relationship with significant other, stepparent or new siblings



UNDERSTANDABLE REASONS FOR RESISTANCE

- Healthy and realistic responses to a parent
- Developmentally expectable reactions
- Preference for a parent
- Witnessing violence/verbal abuse
- Experiencing child abuse/neglect

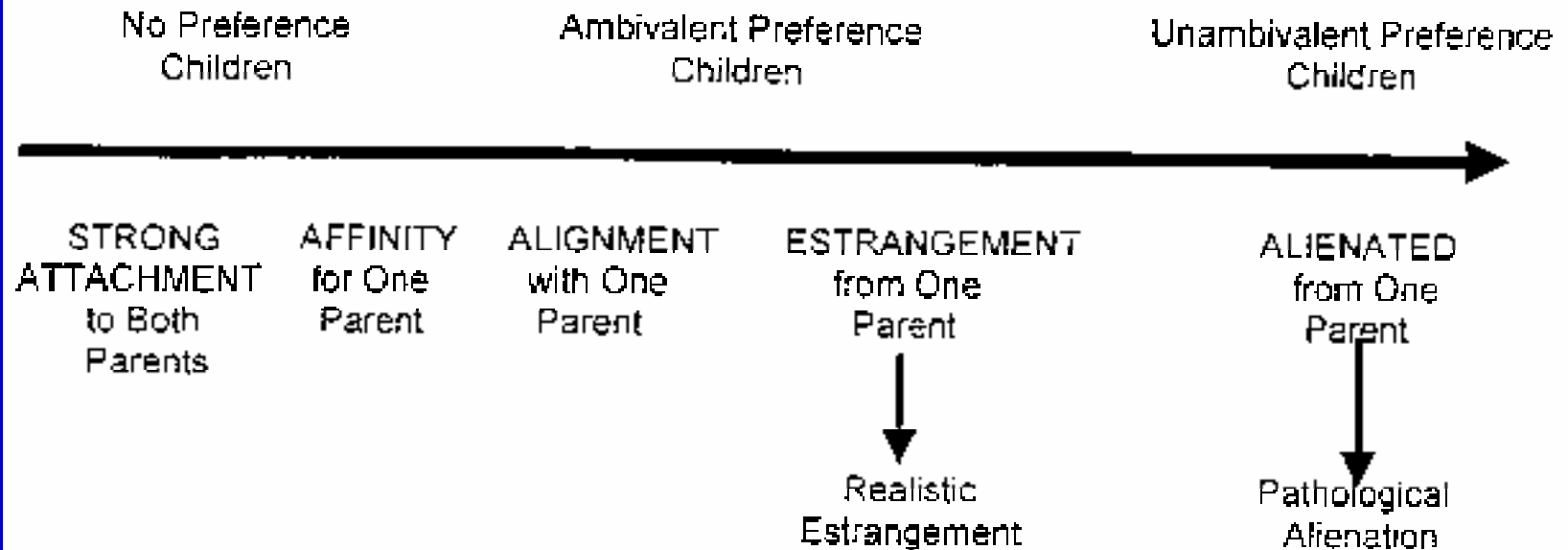
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- Parent's mental health problems
 - Parent's chemical use issues



DEVELOPMENTALLY EXPECTABLE REACTIONS

- Separation difficulties
- Gender preference
- Cognitive limits on processing competing loyalties
- Cognitive limits on processing different expectations

ATTACHMENT/ALIENATION CONTINUUM



From: Joan Kelly, Ph.D.

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REJECTING PARENTS

- Often enmeshed with the child
- Elevates the child to parent's confidante
- Undermines child's confidence in/attachment to rejected parent
- Exaggerates of other parent's deficits
- Has high level of anxiety or histrionic style



REJECTING PARENTS

- Uses derogatory and blaming statements
- Has sense of superior parenting skills



REJECTED PARENT

- Has difficulty separating own from child's needs
- Has difficulty separating child's feelings from other parent's
- Is insensitive re impact of divorce on the child and/or the other parent
- Lacks insight & self-reflection



REJECTED PARENT

- Tries to convince child of “wrongness” of other parent’s views
- May or may not have been close with the child before separation
- May disparage rejecting parent
- Has inappropriate reactions to rejection
- Is either too passive or too aggressive in trying to establish parenting time



THE ALIENATED CHILD

- Often has pre-existing emotional problems
- Often has weak self-concept/self-esteem
- Often has inability to tolerate anger, conflict
- Often has unmet dependency needs
- Often has sense of entitlement
- Feels unheard about her concerns



THE ALIENATED CHILD

- Often has sense of abandonment
- Often has been triangulated in parental conflict before separation
- Often has been unable to separate self from rejecting parent
- Lacks flexibility and resilience
- Has a tendency to think in terms of black and white



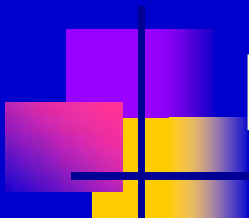
THE ALIENATED CHILD

- Freely expresses intense dislike or hatred
- Cites trivial or false reasons for the dislike or hatred
- Talks openly about rejected parent's shortcomings
- Sees the rejecting parent as "all good"



THE ALIENATED CHILD

- Reacts out of proportion to rejected parent's mistakes
- Appears rehearsed
- Rejects extended family/pets
- "Borrows" stories from others



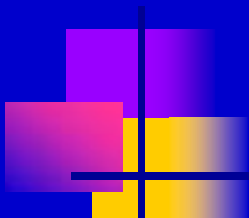
PREVIOUS PARENTAL RELATIONSHIP

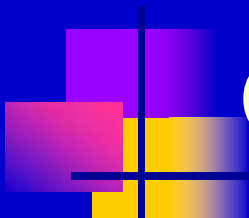
- Negative personality features
- Projection of blame & denial prominent
- Poor conflict resolution skills
- Chronic defensiveness
- At least one parent playing “victim” role



ALIENATING PARENT

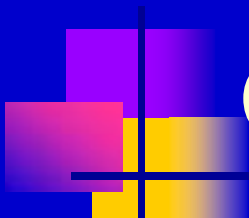
- Intrudes in parent's time
- Attributes all problems to other parent
- Removes all reminders of parent
- Withholds presents/letters
- Impedes phone contact
- Finds excuses to cancel visits

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- Questions child extensively upon return
 - Rejects child after visits
 - Alleges abuse of child
 - Views attempts at contact with child as harassment
 - Openly denigrates parent to child



INTERVENTIONS IN HIGH-CONFLICT CASES

- Consider:
 - Comprehensive assessment
 - Therapy: Individual parent, family, child
 - Orders that are highly detailed
 - Case management phone calls
 - Review hearings



INTERVENTIONS IN HIGH-CONFLICT CASES

- Firing aligned professionals
- Altering parenting plan
- Appointing a Parenting Coordinator
- Use of website for schedule, e.g.
ourfamilywizard.com



PARENTING ARRANGEMENTS

- Angry divorce → Traditional timesharing
- Distant divorce → More integrated timesharing
- Cooperative divorce → Closely integrated timesharing



PARALLEL PARENTING

- When parents don't trust each other
- When communication is very poor
- When winning and losing are prominent
- When neither parent is harmful on their own



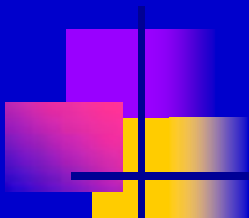
PARALLEL PARENTING

- Parents develop own structure and routine
- Parents don't attempt to co-parent
- Parents don't discuss other's parenting style
- Communication only about major issues
- Limited frequency of communication



ROLE OF THE PC

- Resolve impasses
- Extricate children from the battlefield
- Achieve a business-like co-parenting relationship
- Provide a neutral forum for the expression of conflict

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- Educate about post-divorce parenting
 - Model and teach basic communication skills
 - Reduce the rate of re-litigation



FUNCTIONS

- Monitor the implementation of schedules and parenting plans
- Resolve disputes about discipline and other parenting practices
- Maintain communication between professionals
- Report to the Court as needed



"I got custody of the kids. Do you want one?"